



Information Sheet – Winter Health

Let's look at the most common winter miseries and get an explanation of why they occur, and what you can do about them.

Immune System

A strong immune system is vital for your body to fight colds and flu; so why might your immune system be a bit of a flop?

Your immune system needs the right nutrients in order to work well. Lack of vitamin C is common, as is a lack of zinc. Stress reduces the effectiveness of immune function. You will have realised that when you are tired or under pressure, you fall prey to bugs more easily. Alcohol and nicotine use up the nutrients your immune system needs and have a paralysing effect on the cells of the immune system. A few nights out in the pub may make you less resistant to invading viruses. Strangely enough sugar, although it may seem to make our lives sweeter, does no favours to the immune system. If you are living from chocolate bar to chocolate bar throughout the winter with the occasional detour into chocolate fudge cake, your immune system will struggle.

How can I improve my immune system

- Take Vitamin C and zinc over the winter. Vitamin C is only absorbed in small quantities so taking a low dose several times a day is a good way of constantly topping up.
- Don't stay cooped up indoors - get some fresh air, even if it's on the icy cold side. If you live or work in a centrally heated, air-conditioned environment, it is particularly important to get some oxygen into your lungs regularly.
- Get enough rest and relaxation – your immune system stokes up during deep sleep and when you are deeply relaxed, so you have a health enhancing excuse for a few early nights.
- Take Echinacea, because it helps improve the way your immune system spots and deals with the bugs that might harm you. There are two ways of using Echinacea:
 - As a cure – take it three times a day when you feel a bug creeping up on you. This will shorten the duration of the cold.
 - As a preventative –take it once or twice a day throughout the whole winter season, to keep your immune system on its toes and to prevent any bug getting through the defences.



Influenza

The flu is like a cold in many ways and is similarly caused by viruses. Flu symptoms, however, quickly become more severe than those of a cold and are more wide ranging. For example, you may experience a sudden headache, muscle aches, fatigue and weakness, with chills and a fever. Flu may leave you feeling depressed and weak, even after the main symptoms have gone.

Coughs and chest infections

The mucous membranes have the job of producing mucus to wash bugs and beasties out of the body. Mucus is brought up from the lungs by a contractive wave - a cough. This is really necessary to clear muck from the respiratory tract. It becomes a misery, however, when the cough is persistent and isn't bringing up anything useful. Chronic coughs are slightly different, as they may be the result of lung disease, e.g. Bronchitis. If you have a persistent cough, consult your Doctor.

How can I stop my hacking cough?

The most important principle is not to prevent a cough from doing its job. Mucus is better out than in, so it shouldn't be left lying in your lungs. What you need to do is:

- Thin the mucus a little so that it is easier to shift.
- Relax the bronchial muscles so that you don't get painful spasms of Coughing unnecessarily.

This will mean that the body can shift the dregs of the cold from your respiratory system without undue trauma.

Some other suggestions:

- Take vitamin C regularly, as it is needed for strengthening the lung lining, especially if there has been irritation or infection in the respiratory tract.
- Use Echinacea to boost your immune system in case of lingering infection.
- Take Ivy-Thyme Complex to improve the ability of the lungs to expel mucus. This combination of herbs works by thinning the mucus, loosening it from 'the respiratory tract and making it easier to propel upwards, whilst reducing the muscle spasm that racks your chest.

You will have fewer coughs but they will be more productive! Clearing your chest effectively means you are more likely to recover fully and not be vulnerable to further infections. For persistently clogged chests, use a herb called Mullein, which is great for heavy congestion lying solidly in the lungs.



Catarrh

Whether it features as part of your chesty cough, or just persistently sits in your throat and sinuses causing you to feel like a dried up concrete mixer, catarrh is nothing but a pain. One of the reasons we see more of this problem nowadays is that, as it is exposed to irritants and pollutants, the body constantly washes away foreign objects from the nasal passages and the lungs.

Another factor is the large amount of dairy products we consume which tend to clog the mucous membranes. Many young children suffering from repeated ear infections and 'glue ear' benefit greatly from reducing the amount of dairy products they consume, as do adults experiencing constant catarrhal blockages.

When catarrh is present in the ear, nose & throat (ENT), it can fill the sinuses which in turn become inflamed and sometimes infected. This will give symptoms such as pressure and pain, causing a 'sinus headache'. These headaches can be very debilitating, making it hard to lift the head from the pillow in the morning!

How can I reduce catarrh?

- Reduce the amount of dairy products you consume, replacing these with the many alternatives available in health stores.
- Reduce the amount of refined sugar in your diet
- Include garlic in your diet as this is good for clearing congested tissue.
- Take Plantago, a herb that clears catarrh from the ENT tract. This herb is more for the head, which is distinct from Ivy-Thyme Complex which is for the lungs.
- Take Echinacea alongside Plantago if there is any sign of infection.